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ABSTRACT

This monograph details the Notre Dame Parenting Project, a comprehensive longitudinal study of the lives of adolescent mothers and their children from pregnancy through the first 8 years of life, describing how their respective developmental trajectories are interwoven and linked to the social contexts in which they live. A total of 281 primiparous adolescent mothers participated in the study. Phase 1 of the project identified personal and social factors differentiating early childbearers from adult and nonpregnant adolescents and used prenatal maternal variables to predict early childrearing practices and child development. Phase 2 charted developmental trajectories of teen mothers and their children at ages 3 and 5, assessing the emergence of developmental delays as well as identifying resilient mothers and children. Interviews were also conducted to explore qualitatively the life stories of four mothers and their children. Phase 3 of the study followed mothers and children through age 8 and assessed the children's intellectual ability, academic achievement, and adaptive development in Grade 2. In general, the findings suggested that teen mothers and their children experienced a multitude of serious problems that demand serious attention and warrant comprehensive intervention. Adolescent mothers were significantly less prepared cognitively for parenting than adult mothers, with deficiencies associated with later adverse maternal and child cognitive, behavioral, and socioemotional outcomes. The adolescent mothers also exhibited poorer socioemotional adjustment than adult mothers, and displayed feelings of anxiety and depression 3 and 5 years later. Social supports are often absent or conflicted. The majority of teen mothers were operating in the low average, borderline, or mentally retarded range of intelligence. At 3 years, 72 percent of the children displayed delays in at least one developmental domain. At age 5, 78 percent exhibited delays in at least one domain. Preliminary analyses of data for 8-year-olds indicated that more than 70 percent had problems of low achievement, learning disabilities, or mental retardation. The monograph concludes with policy-related recommendations

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designed to optimize long-term developmental outcomes in adolescent mothers and their children and to forestall the delays observed in this study. Contains 250 references. (KB)

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